

Editorial

Affective Imagination and Adaptive Expression: Creativity, Curiosity, and the Emotional Self

Across the history of personality and individual differences psychology, imagination has stood as the bridge between cognition and affect: a means of transforming experience into meaning. The present volume of *Individual Differences Research (IDR)* assembles reprints from our library and new contributions exploring how emotion, awareness, and symbolic understanding converge in adaptive self-expression. This editorial introduction for the volume situates the included works within a broader theoretical and empirical framework, tracing a developmental arc from emotional regulation and embodiment to curiosity and creative openness.

Reprinted Foundations: Emotion, Self-Awareness, and Embodiment

The volume begins with Ben Mijuskovic's (2014/2021) essay on loneliness, self-consciousness, and trauma. This is a penetrating reflection on the existential nature of loneliness following trauma. Drawing from phenomenology and clinical observation, Mijuskovic portrays loneliness as an inescapable byproduct of human self-awareness. The same capacity that allows symbolic imagination, that is, the ability to observe oneself as object, renders the individual susceptible to alienation and affective pain. In this view, self-consciousness and suffering are two sides of the same coin, echoing the classic insights of Sartre (1956) and the existential-humanistic tradition (Bugental, 1965). Contemporary emotion-regulation research likewise recognizes that reflective awareness both enables and complicates adaptation (Gross, 2015). Mijuskovic's essay thus anchors the volume in the paradox of emotional consciousness: the awareness that liberates us is also what wounds us.

Following this theoretical foundation, Todd Jackson and Karen Eglitis (2005/2021) offer an empirical study of social anxiety, self-presentation, and threat perception during videotaped introductions. Participants' physiological and self-reported reactions revealed how perceived evaluation heightens self-conscious emotion and influences behavioral performance. Rather than pathology, the authors interpret anxiety as a natural consequence of the self's awareness of being perceived, a social mirror that activates both defensive vigilance and adaptive control. Their work bridges affective theory and experimental method, linking Mijuskovic's conceptual loneliness to the regulatory dynamics of real interpersonal behavior. In doing so, it anticipates contemporary models of self-conscious affect (Tangney & Tracy, 2012) and emotion–cognition integration in personality expression.

The third reprint, Patrick Murphy and Lionel Standing's (2014/2021) study on differences in outcomes of tactile and visual warmth on loneliness, grounds these emotional processes in the body. Their study demonstrates that tactile warmth, but not visual imagery of warmth, reduces self-reported loneliness after an ostracism prime. Building on embodied cognition theory (Barsalou, 2008), they show that social connection and sensory experience are neurologically intertwined. Physical warmth functions as a nonverbal cue of belonging, activating associative networks of inclusion and care. These results mirror the broader literature on embodied metaphor (Williams & Bargh, 2008; IJzerman & Semin, 2009), reinforcing that cognition and emotion are inseparable from the body's lived reality. Collectively, the three reprints form an ascending sequence: from reflective self-awareness to social regulation, to embodied feeling, that portrays emotional life as both symbolically constructed and biologically grounded.

New Contributions: Creativity, Curiosity, and the Expanding Self

The two new contributions extend this affective framework into the domain of imagination and creativity. K. Kelly's (2021) study re-examines the factorial architecture of creative personality as measured by her Scale of Creative Attributes and Behavior (SCAB; Kelly, 2004). The study replicates the original five-factor model of Creative Engagement, Cognitive Style, Spontaneity, Tolerance, and Fantasy and identifies two higher-order composites: Cognitive-Productive and Expressive-Experiential. These dimensions capture the fundamental duality of the creative process: disciplined intellectual focus and affective openness to experience. This dual-path conception parallels findings from cognitive neuroscience showing that creativity involves dynamic interaction between executive and default-mode networks (Beaty et al., 2016) and aligns with Baas et al.'s (2013) model of creativity as flexible navigation between persistence and exploration. Creativity thus emerges as a psychological structure that harmonizes emotion, control, and freedom.

The subsequent paper expands the adaptive synthesis of this volume into aesthetic and existential territory. Here, W. Kelly (2021) conceptualizes noctcaelador, the emotional and cognitive attachment to the night sky, as a form of aesthetic curiosity and symbolic engagement. Results reveal that noctcaelador predicts reflective, artistic, and intellectual leisure interests even beyond the Big Five traits and mediates the relation between openness and exploratory behavior. As McCrae and Costa (1997) proposed, openness may represent a cognitive-affective channel through which individuals seek complexity, beauty, and novelty. Noctcaelador exemplifies this tendency, transforming the vastness of the cosmos into a personal locus of wonder. In this respect, creativity and noctcaelador both embody the affective imagination that converts perception into meaning.

Together, these new contributions bring empirical clarity to the conceptual groundwork laid by the reprints. They demonstrate that emotion, curiosity, and imagination are not peripheral to personality but central to its adaptive coherence.

Integrative Perspective

Viewed collectively, the five works in Volume 19 of *IDR* trace a psychological continuum from loneliness and vulnerability, through self-regulation and embodiment, to aesthetic curiosity and

creativity. The affective imagination operates as the unifying mechanism across these levels: it translates emotion into structure, sensation into meaning, and isolation into expression. Modern research increasingly supports this integrative model of the “self.” A model in which creativity and emotion are co-regulators of adaptation (Runco & Jaeger, 2012; Kaufman & Gregoire, 2015).

By juxtaposing theoretical reflection, experimental inquiry, and psychometric validation, this editorial introduction for the present Back Volume of *Individual Differences Research* underscores the continuity of psychological exploration across decades of scholarship. Imagination, whether expressed through embodied empathy, creative production, or cosmic wonder, remains humanity’s most adaptive art: the means by which thought and feeling weave together into the coherent narrative of a living, feeling self.

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